

Message Text

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ACTION SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 22335

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: FRENCH POSITION ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

REF: (A) STATE 204771 (B) PARIS 20282

SUMMARY: BECAUSE OF ITS FORMER ROLE IN INDOCHINA, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE FATE OF THE INDOCHINESE. THE GOF HAS ADOPTED A PROGRAM WHICH COULD RESULT IN OVER 15,000 REFUGEES COMING TO FRANCE OR BEING SETTLED IN FRENCH OVERSEAS DEPARTMENTS OR TERRITORIES. BECAUSE OF THE FEAR THAT TOO RAPID A PACE OF ENTRY OF REFUGEES WOULD OVERBURDEN THE RECEPTION FACILITIES AND DISLOCATE THE LIMITED RESETTLEMENT STRUCTURE, THE GOF HAS ATTEMPTED TO KEEP THE INFLOW BELOW 1,000 A MONTH. BECAUSE OF PROBLEMS WITH SPONSORS IN FRANCE, THE GOF HAS BEGUN ACCEPTING HEADS OF FAMILIES FROM THE U.S. SYSTEM, LEAVING THE FAMILIES IN THE U.S. UNTIL THE PRINCIPAL IS ABLE TO SUPPORT HIS DEPENDENTS. THE FRENCH SHARE OUR DESIRES TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS IN THE INTERESTS OF THE REFUGEES THEMSELVES, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO CHANGE PROCEDURES WHICH NOW CAUSE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE U.S., PARTICULARLY THE SLOW ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES FROM THE U.S. SYSTEM. END SUMMARY

1. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT WISH TO STEAL THE FRENCH THUNDER BY ATTEMPTING TO DESCRIBE FULLY THE FRENCH PROGRAM AND
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INTENTIONS CONCERNING INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, WE BELIEVE

A LITTLE BACKGROUND MAY BE OF INTEREST TO THE DEPUTY SECRETARY PRIOR TO HIS MEETING AT THE QUAI. THE GOF HAS BEEN VERY CONCERNED ABOUT NOT ONLY THE LARGE NUMBER OF FRENCH NATIONALS (INCLUDING MANY OF ASIAN ORIGIN) IN INDOCHINA, BUT ALSO ABOUT THE INDOCHINESE WHO HAD IN THE PAST BEEN CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH THE GOF. THE FRENCH WERE VERY SURPRISED AND DISTRESSED WHEN FRENCH NATIONALS WHO HAD REMAINED IN PHNOM PENH WERE SUBJECTED TO VERY SEVERE TREATMENT AND EXPELLED UNDER CONDITIONS OF EXTREME HARDSHIP. AS FOR VIETNAM, FOLLOWING CONTACTS WITH BOTH THE DRV AND PRG THE GOF ADOPTED THE POSITION OF ENCOURAGING ALL SUCH PERSONS TO REMAIN IN PLACE DURING THE PERIOD WHEN SAIGON WAS COLLAPSING. HOWEVER QUITE A FEW VIETNAMESE WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN EXIT PERMITS DURING THE LAST DAYS OF SAIGON BY SUBSTANTIAL BRIBES, AND MANY CAME TO FRANCE. IN ADDITION, AFTER

THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER, MANY VIETNAMESE ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD GRAVITATED TO FRANCE. VIETNAMESE WHO HAD BEEN UNABLE TO GET EXIT PERMITS AND TOOK THE U.S. EVACUATION FLIGHTS, THEN CHOSE TO COME TO FRANCE. ALSO, MANY VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AND OTHER TEMPORARY RESIDENTS IN FRANCE HAVE DECIDED TO SETTLE HERE BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID TO RETURN TO SVN. THE FRENCH HAVE NOT PROVIDED VERY GOOD STATISTICS ON VIETNAMESE IN THE ABOVE CATEGORIES, BUT THE NUMBERS APPEAR TO BE SIGNIFICANT.

2. FRANCE HAS ALSO EMBARKED ON A PROGRAM SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED FOR REFUGEES OUTSIDE FRANCE, INDOCHINESE IN HONG KONG, THAILAND, MALAYSIA AS WELL AS IN THE U.S. HAVE BEEN ABLE TO QUALIFY FOR DOCUMENTATION TO COME TO FRANCE. THE ORIGINAL GUIDANCE SPECIFIED VIETNAMESE WITH CLOSE RELATIVES IN FRANCE OR WHO HAD WORKED FOR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT. LATER THE GUIDANCE WAS BROADENED TO PERMIT APPROVAL OF INDOCHINESE WHO WOULD BE READILY ASSIMILABLE IN FRANCE, THAT IS THOSE WITH A FRENCH EDUCATION AND SOME TECHNICAL CAPABILITY. THE GOF IS NOW ALSO INTERESTED IN ACCEPTING TECHNICALLY TRAINED INDOCHINESE WHOSE TALENTS MAY BE NEEDED IN SOME FRENCH OVERSEAS DEPARTMENTS OR TERRITORIES. THE GOF IS NOW CONFIDENTIAL

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APPARENTLY EVEN CONSIDERING A NEW PROGRAM FOR SETTLING SIMPLE PEASANTS IN NEW CALEDONIA -- THE UK OPPOSED A SIMILAR PROGRAM FOR THE NEW HEBRIDES.

3. WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A FRENCH AIRLIFT BETWEEN SAIGON AND BANGKOK, THE GOF HAS BEEN ABLE TO BRING OUT FROM SVN CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS OF FRENCH CITIZENS -- COUNTING FRENCH OF ASIAN ORIGIN, THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY

10,000 IN SVN. ALTHOUGH NOT STRICTLY SPEAKING REFUGEES
THESE EVACUEES WILL MAKE DEMANDS ON GOF REFUGEE FUNDS

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AND FACILITIES SINCE MANY OF THEM HAVE NO RESOURCES OR
RELATIVES IN FRANCE.

4. THE FRENCH HAVE AVOIDED PUBLICITY AS MUCH AS POSSIB-
LE PARTICULARLY CONCERNING THE NUMBERS OF INDOCHINESE
THEY HAVE ACCEPTED BECAUSE OF A FEAR OF UNION REACTION
OVER ALLEGED COMPETITION FOR EMPLOYMENT. THE GOF HAS
ALSO WISHED TO AVOID SETTING UP LARGE RECEPTION CENTERS
LIKE THOSE IN THE U.S. NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF FEAR OF
PUBLICITY, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE REFUGEES SETTLE
IN BETTER IF THEY GO DIRECTLY TO NEW HOMES. THE GOF
HAS THEREFORE LIMITED ISSUANCE OF ENTRY DOCUMENTS TO
1,000 A MONTH TO AVOID A PACE WHICH WOULD GO
BEYOND THE LIMITED CAPABILITIES OF THE MODEST RECEPTION
FACILITIES AND MAKE FOR LONG TERM CAMP OCCUPANTS. SINCE
THE GOF CONSIDERS THE REFUGEES IN THE U.S. SYSTEM TO
BE IN LESS JEOPARDY THAN THOSE IN ASIA, IT HAS GIVEN
PRIORITY TO THE LATTER. IN ADDITION, THE GOF HAS FOUND
THAT A SPONSOR'S ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT FOR A FAMILY
HAVE OFTEN NOT BEEN RESPECTED. THE GOF HAS THEREFORE
STARTED GIVING APPROVAL FOR THE HEAD OF FAMILY TO COME
TO FRANCE, LEAVING HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN IN A U.S. CAMP

UNTIL HE HAS FOUND A JOB AND CAN GIVE ASSURANCES THAT HE CAN SUPPORT HIS FAMILY. SINCE WE HAVE WISHED TO MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM OF DEPARTURES FROM THE U.S. CAMPS AND HAVE ALSO WISHED TO KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER, WE HAVE
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URGED THE GOF TO MODIFY THESE POLICIES WITH LITTLE SUCCESS TO DATE.

5. THE FRENCH HAVE NO MONEY APPROPRIATED FOR TRAVEL OF REFUGEES TO FRANCE OR FOR TRAVEL FROM FRANCE TO A COUNTRY OF FINAL SETTLEMENT. SINCE THE U.S. PAYS FOR TRAVEL TO FRANCE FROM THE U.S., WE BELIEVE TRAVEL FROM FRANCE TO THE U.S. SHOULD BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOF. SINCE IN GENERAL REFUGEES GOING TO THE U.S. HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SCRAPE UP THE FUNDS FOR THE TRIP, WE HAVE NOT FOUND IT NECESSARY TO PUSH TOO HARD ON THIS MATTER WITH THE GOF -- WHICH CONSIDERS THAT THESE EXPENSES SHOULD BE BORNE BY THE UNHCR, NOT THE GOF.

6. CLAUDE CHAYET, DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONVENTIONS AND CONSULAR AFFAIRS AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO HANOI WAS A LOGICAL CHOICE TO HANDLE THE COORDINATION OF THE RECEPTION OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE HAS ALSO BEEN CLOSELY INVOLVED IN THE RUNNING OF THE RECEPTION CENTERS AND THE ARRANGEMENTS WITH PRIVATE AGENCIES FOR SUPPORT TO THOSE WITHOUT SPONSORS OR EMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE. IN ADDITION, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGED THE CREATION OF AN ASSOCIATION TO ASSIST THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES HEADED BY FORMER MINISTER, JEAN SAINTENY, LONG PROMINENT IN FRENCH RELATIONS WITH ASIA. SOME OF THE LONGER TERM PROBLEMS SUCH AS TRAINING FOR REFUGEES ARE BEING HANDLED BY THIS ASSOCIATION WHICH IS ALSO ENCOURAGING CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SMALLER PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS OFTEN DESIGNED TO ASSIST SEGMENTS OF THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE COMMUNITY.

7. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IS, THEREFORE, ACTUALLY DOING QUITE A BIT FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES OF VARIOUS KINDS AND WILL BE ABSORBING INTO FRANCE PROBABLY OVER 15,000 OF THEM, MORE THAN ANY COUNTRY OTHER THAN THE U.S. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ALSO BELIEVES THAT ITS DELIBERATE PACE IN ACCEPTING REFUGEES PERMITS THE BEST ABSORPTION INTO FRANCE AND ALSO MINIMIZES THE POSSIBILITY OF PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO THEIR PROGRAM. WHILE THE QUAI WILL SUPPORT COMPLETELY OUR BASIC GOALS CONCERNING RESETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES AND
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WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO SHIRK FRANCE'S OWN RESPONSIBILITY
FOR MANY OF THE THOUSANDS UPROOTED FROM THEIR HOMES IN
INDOCHINA, IT WILL REQUIRE CONSIDERABLE U.S. PERSUASIVE-
NESS TO CHANGE FRENCH PROCEDURES WHICH THEY CALL
DELIBERATE, BUT WE CALL SLOW.
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